



A crowd gathers to hear OWC Studios' Alec Peters talk about the state of Axanar at the Atlanta Science Fiction and Fantasy Expo. Photo/Lee Benjamin (Facebook)

The State of Axanar

Fact Check of Public Claims; Peters Offers New Details on 'Axanar Lite' Production

By  Carlos Pedraza

DECATUR, Ga. — *Prelude to Axanar* “proved how broken the Hollywood [financial] model is,” OWC Studios head [Alec Peters](#) told a panel here, where he criticized [CBS](#) and [Paramount Pictures](#) for suing him instead of embracing the *Axanar* fan film.

Peters spoke March 3, 2018, at the Atlanta Science Fiction and Fantasy Expo’s panel, “*Axanar*: The Ultimate Fan Film,” describing “the past, present and future” of his project, even as he spent more than one-fifth of his time at the beginning talking about *Star Trek: Discovery* instead.

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Axanar and Discovery

The panel's description on the expo's website claimed, without attribution, that *Prelude to Axanar* was "being favorably compared" to *Discovery*, and Peters' bio there described him as "highly regarded for creating the fan film that many say was the inspiration for *Star Trek Discovery*."

Since the claim was unattributed, **AxaMonitor** contacted an expo representative to learn who authored Peters' bio. The representative said the bio was co-written by Peters and expo staff.¹⁾

Most of the panel's opening was devoted to Peters' opinion of the new show, which he said he generally liked but opposed the notion that it is set in the same "universe" as the original series. Eventually, the panel turned to discussing *Axanar* itself.



CLARIFICATION The original version of this article incorrectly implied **AxaMonitor** had directly asked an expo representative who had written the unattributed claim in Peters' website bio that *Axanar* inspired *Discovery*. AxaMonitor regrets the error.



 **Alec Peters**

'Oh, please. When I die, on my tombstone is gonna be "Creator of Axanar."' — *OWC Studios head Alec Peters*

Broken Hollywood Model

Peters criticized the way CBS and Paramount treated him in the [copyright infringement lawsuit](#), saying they missed an opportunity to upend Hollywood's financing model by including fan films in the marketing of their movies.

He began his comments with a dismissive summary of the 13-month lawsuit that had riven Star Trek's fan base. "We got over it, we settled." But later summarized, "The fact that CBS and Paramount sued me... I don't know. I came out of that OK. ... I'm not knocking CBS and Paramount. I feel they missed an opportunity."



BEHIND THE SCENES of *Prelude to Axanar* (actor [Tony Todd](#), left, and director [Christian Gossett](#)). Producer Alec Peters claims it represents a missed opportunity for CBS and Paramount.

He told the panel CBS missed what he called “the bigger picture” *Axanar* represented:

“The studio missed the opportunity to create a whole new paradigm in Hollywood about how a movie is funded,” Peters said. CBS could have screened *Prelude* as a short before the 2016 theatrical release of *Star Trek Beyond*, or as “an online teaser” to the feature film, or streamed on CBS All Access.

Peters offered no evidence of the financial windfall he predicted for CBS or Paramount had they taken him up on his offer.

“See the fan reaction, then let us continue by raising money online from Kickstarter, making these films, then giving them to you,” Peters imagined aloud. “Once again, we don’t want anything. The thrill of making *Star Trek* is what we want.”



NOT PROFITING Despite Peters’ claim he never sought to make money from Axanar, he operated an online store with a full line of *Star Trek*-based [merchandise](#) that brought in still unaccounted-for earnings.

'No Profit'

That didn’t jibe with the nearly three-quarter million dollars he spent to build a commercial studio or sell *Trek*-based merchandise in an online store, while paying himself and others a salary. Peters dismissed critics’ claims he was making a profit from Axanar.

“Oh, please,” he scoffed. “When I die, on my tombstone is gonna be ‘Creator of Axanar,’” pivoting to a recitation of his résumé, including coaching national champion women’s volleyball teams at the University of Southern California, coaching U.S. national team and “building a company sold for millions of dollars. The thing that people will remember me for is creating Axanar. Because it is enduring, it is true to *Star Trek*.”

Meanwhile, the federal judge in the lawsuit, [R. Gary Klausner](#), indeed found that Peters had profited from Axanar:

Peters' substantial involvement in, such as writing script for, the Axanar Works materially contributes to the infringing conduct of Axanar Productions. ... As to vicarious infringement, Peters, as the president of Axanar Productions, was in charge of and was responsible for its conducts. He was responsible for many of the artistic decisions. He supervised and controlled Axanar Productions. **Peters also profited directly from the Axanar Works.**²⁾ [citations omitted]



U.S.S. ARES, designed for *Prelude to Axanar* in 2014. *Image/Axanar Productions*

Inspiring Discovery

Although Peters himself made no claim *Axanar* inspired the new official Star Trek series, he held up his hands, saying people were coming to that conclusion on their own, given *Discovery* is set in the same year as *Prelude's* retrospective of the "Klingon war we came up with." In *Prelude's* timeline, however, the war occurred a decade before *Discovery's* setting.



U.S.S. SHENZHOU, designed by John Eaves for *Star Trek Discovery* in 2016. *Image/Eaglemoss*

"Who knows?" if *Discovery* copied *Axanar*, Peters asked, throwing up his hands. He said he wouldn't concede it hadn't unless *Discovery* creator Bryan Fuller told him so himself.

Previously, Peters had described Fuller as "a big fan of *Axanar*." That turned out to be a dubious claim. In a 2016 interview Fuller responded to a question about whether *Discovery* was based in any way on *Axanar*: "I actually don't know what the history of *Axanar* is," Fuller said.³⁾

Ares vs. Shenzhou



 **U.S.S. MAWSON**, designed by John Eaves c. 2009, for a fan club in Australia. *Image/USS Mawson*

In that vein Peters — unprompted — raised the similarity in the design between *Discovery*'s U.S.S. Shenzhou and the U.S.S. Ares in *Prelude*.

An odd comparison because Peters himself acknowledged Shenzhou's creator, [John Eaves](#), came up with a similar design on behalf of an Australian fan club years before the Ares was designed.

Making Axanar Lite

Eventually, Peters turned discussion toward the pending production of the two, 15-minute short films — nicknamed "[Axanar Lite](#)" — that are all that's left of *Axanar* following the [copyright lawsuit settlement](#) in January 2017. *Axanar* director [Robert Meyer Burnett](#) told **AxaMonitor** he wanted to make the first 30 minutes of the *Axanar* feature under the terms of the settlement.

Peters had a different idea, wanting to replicate the success of *Prelude*. At the time, he wrote:

It is possible the two 15-minute episodes will be two more episodes of "The Four Years War" documentary [like *Prelude* to *Axanar*], as that is a great story telling format, which we have proven ourselves able to execute.⁴⁾

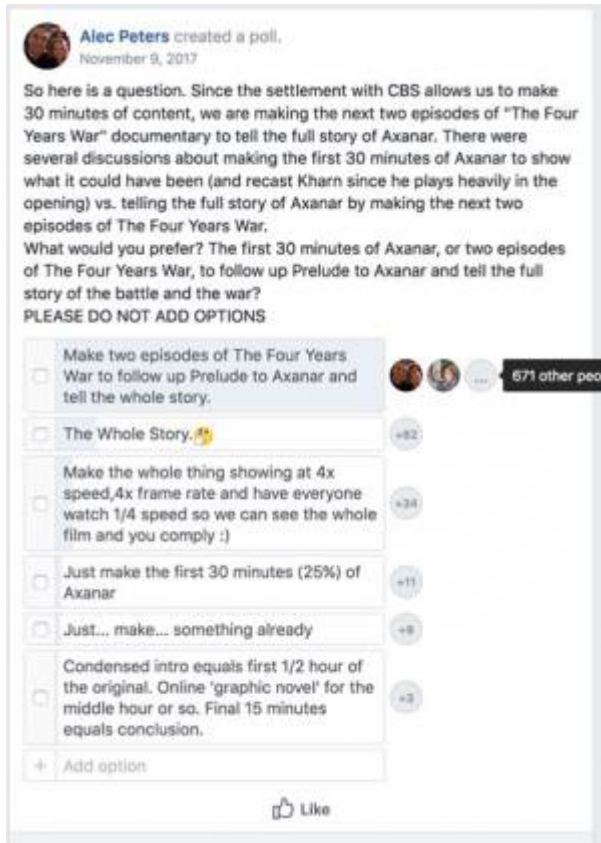
Timeline Discrepancies

In the panel discussion a number of discrepancies turned up in Peters' account of the *Axanar* timeline.

Ex Post Facto Fan Poll

Even before a meeting in February 2017 of *Axanar*'s leadership, Peters said he had already decided to follow *Prelude*'s documentary format, something he said fans told him [in a poll](#) in *Axanar*'s Fan Group on Facebook. In fact, that poll was conducted nine months later, long after Peters had already decided.

In November 2017, Burnett, whose 30-minute narrative idea had been rejected by Peters, and who never actually confirmed he'd direct *Axanar Lite*, [resigned from Axanar](#).



EX POST FACTO The poll Alec Peters said made up his mind about Axanar Lite’s format was conducted almost nine months *after* he’d already announced what he was doing.

“We need to do what the fans want,” Peters said about the poll results favoring continuation of the “Four Years War” documentary. But he hadn’t run that poll on Facebook until November 9, a week *after* Burnett’s resignation — months after Peters had already announced he would take the documentary approach.

Georgia Move

Peters admitted that he had begun planning in February 2017 to move out of his [California studio](#) weeks before his [unsuccessful Indiegogo](#) campaign to try to put the beleaguered facility on a sound financial footing. It appeared he had planned for the crowdfunding to fail.

Production News

Peters was directly asked when Axanar Lite would begin production. He waffled in his reply, claiming he was “trying to plan out this year,” with shooting originally scheduled in May, but meeting several obstacles, including cast availability and one actor whose hairstyle had radically changed.

More Characters

Even so, Peters did reveal some aspects about how he plans to shoot Axanar Lite. Despite the 30-minute run time, the two 15-minute episodes comprising the production will feature a dozen

characters, with more of the ship's crew and other starship captains than in the original feature-length script.

'Despite the rosy picture Peters painted, Axanar Lite faces some rather large obstacles, including no announced cast, no director, no announced crew and no money.'

Shooting Schedule

Peters estimated a three to four-day shooting schedule, likely split between an as-yet unidentified studio in Los Angeles and an unconfirmed location in the Atlanta area. Though the unfinished *Axanar* sets are stored at Peters' warehouse, dubbed OWC Studios, in Lawrenceville, Ga.

Shooting Location in Doubt

Ironically, Peters admitted the warehouse may not even be used to produce the episodes; the facility is subsidized by the tech company, Other World Computing.

"We're trying to split between here in our [Lawrenceville, Ga.] studio or a friend's studio that has a big green screen, and L.A., where a lot of the actors and makeup guy are," Peters said. "We're not sure how that's split up between L.A. and Atlanta."

That differs somewhat from the impression Peters had given Axanar spokesman Mike Bawden as recently as a month before, when Bawden told **AxaMonitor**:

"The last time I spoke to Alec, we discussed plans for shooting in Georgia and nothing was said about shooting in California — although just because we didn't talk about it doesn't mean it won't happen."⁵⁾

Challenges

Despite the rosy picture Peters painted, Axanar Lite faces some rather large obstacles, including:

- No announced cast
- No director
- No announced crew
- No money.

Peters has estimated Axanar Lite will cost \$200,000, and he is prohibited under the terms of the settlement from raising money publicly, through such efforts as crowdfunding campaigns.

« If you look at all the negative press about Axanar almost none of it is about the story itself, none of it about how it looks. The criticism is not about the product, it's about the producer. » — *Axanar Fan Group leader Reece Watkins*

Casting

Peters claimed that before the lawsuit he had considered casting *Discovery* lead actor Jason Isaacs, though he did not say for which role. He said his girlfriend had a friend who knows Jason Isaacs. He also said he'd "had conversations with Doug [Jones]," who plays Saru in *Discovery*. "Obviously, I love the actors they're casting for *Discovery*."

Timeline for Completion

Though he wouldn't say when production would begin, Peters said he expected to be working on Axanar Lite for the next year and a half.

End of Fan Films

Though the Axanar lawsuit is often blamed for the end of fan films as they'd been known, Peters said competition among all the biggest fan productions had escalated to an "arms race" that led to the restrictions in the [fan production guidelines](#) released by CBS in June 2016.

Guidelines

In that atmosphere, Peters claimed the fan film community begged CBS for fan film guidelines. "We were all going, 'give us some guidelines, give us some guidelines.'" CBS refused.

Peters said CBS Vice President [Bill Burke](#) told him in 2013, "Quote: 'It would take the CEO of CBS and the CEO of Paramount sitting in a room and doing nothing but talk about fan films in order for us to produce guidelines.'"

As it turned out, Peters said, "Obviously it was easier for them to come up with guidelines than they were telling us for years. and that's all we wanted."

Of course, it took a multimillion-dollar lawsuit to prompt development of the guidelines, and they resulted in drastically curtailed fan productions. At the time Peters described them as "draconian." One particular, popular fan production bore the brunt early of the new restrictions.



ANOTHER DISCOVERY The scrapped sequel to *Star Trek-Horizon* also featured a starship named Discovery. *Image/Tommy Kraft*

Star Trek-Horizon

In the Q&A, Peters addressed a woman who said CBS had threatened to sue Tommy Kraft over his

planned sequel to *Star Trek - Horizon*, arguably the most successful Trek fan film, having far surpassed *Prelude to Axanar* in YouTube views. Actually, CBS had only requested Kraft abandon his \$250,000 crowdfunding campaign for the feature-length [Federation Rising](#).

Even though Peters has accused Kraft of [buying views](#) on YouTube — something he didn't mention in the panel discussion — he claimed he was Kraft's "biggest donor." That was not true. Kraft said Peters had [donated \\$600](#) to the crowdfunding effort. According to [Kickstarter's records](#), seven other people donated more than Peters, including two who pledged at least \$1,000 apiece.

Kraft's campaign raised \$22,600, which paid for the feature-length *Horizon*; by contrast, Peters raised \$1.4 million but never produced *Axanar*. Kraft's film garnered more than 8.1 million views⁶⁾ in a fraction of the time it has taken *Prelude to Axanar* to reach only 3.4 million views.⁷⁾

Criticizing Other Fan Productions

The blame thrown at Axanar comes from "a small amount of Axanar haters," Peters said. Another panel member, Axanar Fan Group leader Reece Watkins, said the criticism was unfair.

"If you look at all the negative press about Axanar almost none of it is about the story itself," Watkins said. "None of it about how it looks. The criticism is not about the product, it's about the producer. ... That comes from jealousy."

Of course, the public didn't have a story to [criticize](#) until the *Axanar* screenplay was [leaked](#) long after the lawsuit was settled, and after court documents pointed to Peters' [financial mismanagement](#), which placed building his commercial studio ahead of the actual production of *Axanar*.

Other fan films "look like high school musicals made in somebody's garage wearing pajamas," Watkins said. Before *Prelude* fan films "looked like crap," he added.

While Peters allowed that *Star Trek New Voyages* and *Star Trek Continues* looked good, "no one would mistake them for real Star Trek. ... Others look like home movies. This is Star Trek fans doing what they love doing. They simply didn't have the assets that we have, access to professional filmmakers, and the desire to do something different."

What really proved "the nail in the coffin of Star Trek fan films" was [crowdfunding](#), Peters said. "It was accelerating. It wasn't just Axanar, it was everything that was going on [in fan films]. ... It all comes down to whether you're threatening CBS and Paramount or not." 🗨️



COMMENTS

Discuss this article in [fAxaMonitor's Facebook group](#).

Additional reporting by Brian Hartsfield

Keywords

[lawsuit](#), [Axanar Lite](#), [guidelines](#), [fan films](#), [fact check](#)

1)
Facebook private message between AxaMonitor editor Carlos Pedraza and the Atlanta SciFi and Fantasy Expo, 2/27/18.

2)
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3)
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5)
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6)
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7)
Prelude's [YouTube page](#), as of 3/9/18.

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